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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE'S RESPONSE TO AVIAN INFLUENZA IN KUALA LUMPUR

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 291 B) 2005 SINGAPORE 3481

11. As noted reftel A, Singapore on February 20 banned poultry and egg imports from the Malaysian state of Selangor (that surrounds Kuala Lumpur) in response to the detection there of H5N1 avian influenza (AI). Singapore Agri-Veterinary Authority (AVA) officials told us that the ban was in accordance with bilateral protocols established following AI outbreaks along Malaysia's border with Thailand during 2003-2004. Singapore's total ban on Malaysian poultry imports in response to this previous outbreak resulted in hoarding and sharp rises in prices of chicken and eggs (reftel B). This situation abated only after Singapore adopted a regionalized approach to its import bans. Currently, in addition to Selangor, Singapore maintains a permanent ban on poultry imports from the northern Malaysian states bordering Thailand (termed a "buffer region"). It allows imports from the AI-free zones of Johor, Malacca, Perak and Negri Sembilan.

12. Contrary to local media reports, which described AVA as having "swung into heightened alert" in response to the Selangor outbreak, AVA officials asserted that they were not undertaking any new precautions or procedures, noting that Singapore had been adhering to a policy of "100-percent" surveillance of all poultry and egg imports from Malaysia since 2004. AVA said that it did not foresee the need to provide assistance to Malaysian veterinary and health authorities since they had considerable experience with managing such outbreaks.

13. Although AVA had previously accredited five farms in Selangor to supply poultry, none has exported to Singapore since August 2004. The ban affects one egg farm in Selangor, which accounts for 5 percent of Singapore's total egg imports from Malaysia. Singapore imports the majority of its poultry and eggs from Malaysia -- approximately 115,000 chickens, 20,000 ducks, and 2 million eggs every day.

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